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THREE SKETCHES FROM THE VALLEY
OF VIRGINIA.

By John Esten Cooke.

II.

WINCHESTER.

 HIS is the place where WASHINGTON was born. It is true that George, the son of a Virginia planter, was born in Westmoreland county, in the year 1732—but Washington was born in Winchester, twenty-four years afterward, in 1756.

It was here that his supreme powers of endurance and resistance were developed. Here he bore the bitter, almost crushing burden of the public care. At twenty-four, young Colonel Washington passed through that fiery gulf of trial which purified him, braced his strength, and hardened every muscle for the Revolutionary struggle. At Winchester he threw off the boy—bade a long farewell to tranquillity and ease. From the year 1756, he was never again the simple country gentleman; on his shoulders rested the immense responsibility of the public weal. Before, he had been gay, careless, fond of the chase, of the society of ladies and good companions; he could jest, and sip his punch, and amuse himself. After this time, he seldom thought of amusement—he seldom jested; neighborhood gossip and personal matters seemed trivial. *Indocilis privata loqui* was said of Caesar—it might have been said, with even greater justice, of Washington.

I will not repeat the strange and touching story of his struggles here. It is all written in the books. There it may be seen how the long-undefended border looked to him alone. He was commandant of Fort Loudoun, at Winchester, then sharing with Fort Cumberland the perilous sentinelship of the frontier, and, thus early, found himself opposed to a bitter and merciless foe. The valleys of the West were then ravaged by the French and savages, the most terrible massacres were of everyday occurrence, men lived in a perpetual dread. The frontiersman never went into his scant patch of corn without his rifle; if he stirred from home, the next wind might bear to him the cries of his wife and children, pitilessly scalped and murdered by the In-

dians; on his return he would probably find his once cheerful cabin a smoking ruin—the mangled body of an infant stretched across the threshold—his wife a bleeding corpse beside it. Men lay down armed, and started at the rustle of a leaf against the window. All along the Opequon, nay, all along the Shenandoah, life was “not worth a purchase;” upon the fair fields the bloody hand might at any moment be laid; men went in peril of their lives from day to day, ready, at the least warning, to fly the region, and, passing the Blue Ridge, abandon the accursed ground forever.

It was at this crisis that Washington was placed at Winchester, and directed to perform impossibilities—to which end his hands were carefully fettered by his Excellency, Governor Dinwiddie. It may all be read in his writings. His letters to the Executive are all there—take away the dates and the names, and they are the letters of General George Washington to Congress. On a smaller theatre, he rehearsed the great contest of the Revolution. Here, as afterward, it was to him that all men looked; and they did not find him cold, unsympathizing, or unequal to the emergency. The cries of these poor people, he wrote Dinwiddie, filled him with such deadly anguish, that, if he knew his own heart, he would gladly give his best blood, his life, to succor them. But his prayer for more forces was disregarded; his letters were left unanswered; then, stung to the quick, his passion flamed out. He would resign his commission—he would leave the service; send him munitions and men, or he would throw up his commission, and his Excellency should bear the awful burden of responsibility. The threat was attended to. The young colonel was already known. He had reinforcements despatched to him, and the frontier was saved from death. It was a hard muscle which he bore away from this place; thereafter, all vicissitudes, all storm and tempest, however terribly they beat upon him, “left him rock.” It is no extravagance of language to say that Washington was born here, cradled in gloom and tempest, baptised in blood, and tempered by a fierce ordeal, as of fire, to the perfect leader of men—the strength upon which a nation might securely lean.

The old fort which he occupied has long crumbled—only a few stones remain. Tradition says that it was built by smiths

and masons from Mount Vernon, and that Washington occupied an apartment built over the southern gateway. Loudoun street now runs directly through the old site—it is the main street of the town—and only in the private lots upon each side may you discern any traces of the old fortress. A well dug by the garrison, a few rude masses of stone, some feebly indicated breastworks—are nearly all that remain. The feet of children dance along over the spot where once was planted the iron heel of Washington; gay pleasure parties pass where roughly clad continentals mustered; a few hundred paces from the once frowning guns of the old border fortress, you are in the midst of gayly decorated stores, and hear the whistle of the cars.

All this is trite and threadbare—an old, a very old story. But let us still repeat it. There is many a tale that is told which may be profitably listened to. Let none say that our lucubrations are idle, declare the moments lost in reading them—reading of what is, after all, only an old fort. A step farther, and they will say, “Only Washington.” For me, every step of that august soul is matter of deep interest. I like to hear the least anecdote of him—how he danced the minuet, how he sat in the saddle, how he bowed, and what was the tone of his voice. I never worshipped hero yet, but I honor and bow low to a great and noble soul. This man was such; and it is not a poor or mean curiosity which follows his steps and delights to discover the least trifle which may illustrate his character and being. These overturned stones of old Fort Loudoun speak of him—they tell me that he did his appointed work as faithfully here, on the remote and almost unknown border, as when raised aloft upon the revolutionary theatre, plain to the world’s great eye. It was duty, always, for its own sake, not for the plaudits which accompanied success. Everywhere, this man’s supreme aim was to do his duty; his great, simple soul cared little for the shouts of the crowd; he sought for self-applause—he won it here, as in the terrible after-tragedy.

It is, thus, sacred ground we tread. Here a greater than the Titans of the old mythology dwelt. His steps are effaced, the house he inhabited has fallen back to earth, but the presence of the man remain, for that man was Washington.

But Winchester has other memories than those connected with the august name of Washington. Other celebrated men tarried here for a season, on their march toward the grave, and have left their footprints on the soil.

It is a beautiful morning—September in the Valley is often like a “morn of May”—let us stroll through the curious-looking old place. There is a tall house which would not attract your attention; in it, however, Daniel Morgan died—the hero of Quebec, Saratoga, the Cowpens; the Ney of the Revolution, the friend of Washington. He was the brave of braves. At Quebec, he stood upon the heights girdled by foes, and could not understand that all was lost until he found himself a single swordsman encircled by the enemy. He was taken prisoner, and offered a colonelcy in the British army if he would embrace the royal cause. His reply was a stern and wrathful refusal. At Saratoga, Gates tried to seduce him to join the cabal against Washington. His reply was an insult which Gates never forgave.

At the Cowpens, Tarleton found himself opposed to one even more daredevil than himself; the panther of the South found his claws suddenly drawn by the partisan. It was here, in Winchester, after a long, arduous life, that Morgan expired tranquilly in his bed, a member of the Episcopal Church, and a good Christian. “People thought old Morgan was never afraid,” he said; “but they were mistaken. He often prayed before going into battle.” His prayers for safety were answered. None of the whistling balls touched him; they passed right and left; he could not rush against one of them, though his form towered in the van wherever he delivered battle. He died here, tranquilly, in 1802.

We pass the handsome “gardens,” and reach the cemetery. It is a picturesque and secluded spot. Here lies my Lord Fairfax. He was buried in the Episcopal Church first, near the present large and handsome court house, but when the church was taken down, his remains were removed to the cemetery. He had been buried beneath the chancel, and the half-century, nearly, had played sad havoc with his lordship. The coffin was some crumbling and moth-eaten wood—within, a handful of dust, and a few bones, were all that remained of his lordship, Thomas, sixth Earl of Fairfax, and Baron of Cam-

eron, in the Kingdom of Scotland—formerly owner of the “Northern Neck,” and a considerable man in his day. So passes the glory of the world—its most glorious beauty is but a fading flower—the grace of the fashion of it perisheth! These, and many more philosophic observations, naturally occur to us as we assist, in imagination, at the disinterment of Lord Fairfax’s remains, and see the handful of crumbling bones, and the scant ashes in the urn. They identified his body, or the dust rather, by the silver plate alone, once tacked to the hard and shining coffin. Once it was a brilliant tablet, riveted upon durable timber; when the chancel pavement was removed, it was a rusty and tarnished gewgaw, clinging insecurely to a bit of wormwood, half-concealed by the dust which had once been Thomas, Lord Fairfax.

“That an English nobleman should be beaten by a Virginia Buckskin!” he said, after the siege of Yorktown. But English nobleman and Virginia Buckskin—Cornwallis and Washington—are dead. They sleep well, and crumble away in peace. Pity that my lord of the Northern Neck was not permitted to return to dust as tranquilly.

As it is rather an historical pilgrimage than the idle stroll of a sight-seer that we take, let us not stop to look at the pleasant “gardens,” or the quiet cemetery—at the elegant gothic cottages, or any “public building.” Let us stop before the vestiges of an old house on this back street. Here stood “Bousch’s Tavern,” and before this tavern, many years ago, stopped a travelling carriage, worn and dusty. From it descended two gentlemen, who were attended by a foreign servant. The three persons approached the portal of the tavern, and asked if they could be provided with lodging. The reply was in the affirmative, and they were shown to a private apartment, behind the door of which they disappeared, amid a number of curious conjectures on the part of the village gossips. The strangers did not reappear, however, or in any manner gratify this curiosity; and, finally, the dinner hour arrived. The public table was spread in the large public room, and a servant announced the fact by rattling on a triangle. The table was soon filled, and a servant was despatched to the apartment of the strangers. The two gentlemen soon appeared, but it was to request that dinner might be sent to their private

room. This request was indignantly refused by the landlord, who, it seems, had conceived the idea that his guests considered themselves “too good” for the public table. If they were not satisfied with the common table, he told them, they might leave his house. The gentlemen bowed gravely, ordered their carriage, paid their bill, and departed. These two men were his Majesty Louis Philippe, King of the French, and his brother, the Duc de Montpensier.

It belongs to the æsthetic calibre of the female mind to lean mostly to beauty and purity of *tint*, while that of the masculine tends to grandeur and elegance of *contour*. We see this illustrated in a promenade in Broadway. *Monsieur* will have the *contour* of his toilette perfection itself; the set of his coat is faultless, and he will not don a hat that presents an ungraceful line. *Madame, au contraire*, first thinks of the *color*, the tint, the exact shade of her robe; should the hue be unbecoming her complexion, she could not dream of purchasing it. The female taste in America is, directly, the most influential in the Fine Arts. We have yet to see *Monsieur* venture to place in the parlor a *chef d’œuvre* to which *Madame* objects—and, as he has the *politesse* to consult her taste in the selection of works of art, and as her taste inclines to color instead of contour, paintings are purchased instead of statuary. But gentlemen are indirectly catering to their *penchant* for contour by introducing sculpture in architectural ornamentations: they are unwittingly *speeding the poesy of contour*, the harmony, beauty, and grace of *lines* in their exquisite “light wagons” and incomparable “equipages”—while the influence of female taste upon the lining and trimming of carriages, within the last ten years, is truly wonderful. Then, everything was brilliant and garish—conspicuous lamps and startling trimmings; now, the hue must be becoming, subordinate and minor objects *en suit*. These two æsthetic tastes act and react upon each other, and while their direct influence upon the female mind is that of patronizing painting more than sculpture, the constitutional tendency of the male mind is perpetually inclining to contour; thus forming a slow and sure basis for the permanent and immortal in Creative Art.

J. H. L.